

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5100

INFO AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 0435

DEPT. PASS TO AF POSTS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, PINS, SF, IS

SUBJ: VORSTER'S TRIP TO ISRAEL

REF: STATE 87612

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER VORSTER'S VISIT TO ISRAEL HAS BEEN ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECEIVED BY SOUTH AFRICA'S WHITE POPULATION. SAG OBVIOUSLY BELIEVES THAT CLOSER IDENTIFICATION WITH ISRAEL WILL PROVIDE BENEFITS FAR OUTWEIGHING POSSIBLE ADVERSE REACTION IN THIRD WORLD. ISRAEL MOTIVATION FOR INVITATION AND APPARENT RED CARPET TREATMENT NOT AT ALL CLEAR FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT. AGREEMENT REACHED ON CABINET-LEVEL CONSULTATIONS RAISES ISSUES WHICH COULD COMPLICATE ISRAELI AND SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS WITH AFRICA AND THIRD WORLD AS WELL AS OURS. END SUMMARY.

2. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE AND AFRIKAANS SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS AND WHITE POLITICIANS HAVE RANGED FROM LAUDATORY TO PANEGYRIC IN PRAISING VORSTER'S VISIT TO ISRAEL AS ANOTHER TRIUMPH OF
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SAG'S FOREIGN POLICY GOAL OF ESTABLISHING FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH ALL NON-COMMUNIST STATES. PRESS ACCOUNTS HAVE LAVISHLY DESCRIBED RED-CARPET TREATMENT AFFORDED BY PRIME MINISTER RABIN TO VORSTER AND HAVE HIGHLIGHTED AGREEMENTS REACHED BY

TWO MEN.

3. ACCORDING TO PRESS, VORSTER AND RABIN AGREED TO ESTABLISH JOINT SOUTH AFRICAN CABINET-LEVEL COMMITTEE WHICH WILL MEET AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR TO DISCUSS ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO:

--ENCOURAGEMENT OF INVESTMENT

--DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE

--SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION

--UTILIZATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN RAW MATERIALS AND ISRAELI MANPOWER IN JOINT PROJECTS.

SAG HAS SO FAR NOT ISSUED ANY DOCUMENT OR STATEMENT ON UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED.

4. PRESS REPORTED VORSTER'S TOUR OF KFIR JET PLANE FACTORY AS WELL AS VISITS TO OTHER MILITARY INSTALLATIONS OR ZONES AND CONTACTS WITH ISRAELI DEFENSE MINISTER PERES. VORSTER'S REPEATED DENIALS THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF ISRAELI ARMS ALSO REPORTED. PRESS HAS, HOWEVER, CONTINUALLY REFERRED TO SIMILARITIES IN STRATEGIC POSITIONS OF TWO NATIONS WITH INFERENCE THAT WEAPONS DEVELOPED FOR USE IN ONE MIGHT BE UTILIZED IN OTHER. SOUTH AFRICA'S INABILITY TO BUY ARMS FROM WEST DUE TO EMBARGO FREQUENTLY MENTIONED, AS WAS BOTH COUNTRIES' HIGH LEVEL OF RESEARCH IN ATOMIC ENERGY FIELD.

5. WE LEAVE IT TO TEL AVIV AND WASHINGTON TO FATHOM ISRAEL'S MOTIVES FOR FIRST INVITING VORSTER, THEN GIVING HIM SUCH DEFERENTIAL TREATMENT, AND FINALLY AGREEING TO CABINET CONSULTATIONS AND COOPERATION IN ECONOMIC AND SCIENTIFIC FIELDS. GRANTED LATTER MAY BE BOILERPLATE, IT NEVERTHELESS CONVEYS IMPRESSION OF VERY CLOSE TIES BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES.

6. SOUTH AFRICAN MOTIVES FOR MAKING TRIP ARE MORE UNDERSTANDABLE. DOMESTICALLY IT SERVES TO OFFSET RECENT UNSC RESOLUTION ON ANGOLA. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED TRADE AND POSSIBLE COOPERATION IN ARMS AND ATOMIC ENERGY WERE LURES OF SOME IMPORTANCE. IT SEEMS THAT SAG DETERMINED THAT IT CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD GAIN MORE FROM VENTURE THAN IT WOULD LOSE. SAG REALIZES THAT THOSE BLACK AFRICAN STATES MOST WILLING TO MAINTAIN SOME SORT OF DIALOGUE WITH SOUTH AFRICA ARE USUALLY ALSO THOSE WHICH ARE MOST FAVORABLY DISPOSED TO ISRAEL. IN OTHER WORDS, DESPITE ALL THE CRITICISM WHICH TRIP WILL ENGENDER FROM AFRICAN STATES, IT WILL PROBABLY, IN SAG'S VIEW, DO IT LITTLE HARM IN ITS LIMITED RELATIONS WITH BLACK AFRICA. SIMILARLY, SAG PROBABLY BELIEVES THAT TRIP WILL NOT INCREASE ITS VULNERABILITY IN INTERNATIONAL OIL MARKET AS ITS GREATEST SUPPLIER (WE MUST ASSUME, SINCE FIGURES ARE TIGHTLY HELD) IS PRAGMATIC IRAN. SAG ALSO NOT OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT FURTHER EROSION IN ITS POSITION IN UN. IT MAY ALSO BELIEVE THAT CLOSER IDENTIFICATION WITH ISRAEL MIGHT

HAVE FAVORABLE INFLUENCE UPON LEGISLATORS IN US AND ELSEWHERE WHO ARE NORMALLY ANTI-SOUTH AFRICAN.

7. WE FORESEE THE VORSTER VISIT HAVING THESE ADVERSE IMPLICATIONS:

A) THE CHARGE OF AN ISRAELI-SOUTH AFRICAN ANTI-LIBERATION AXIS WHICH HAS GAINED CURRENCY IN THIRD WORLD IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN BOLSTERED BY THE VISIT AND ESPECIALLY BY THE MILITARY EMPHASIS OF THE PROGRAM AS PROTRAYED IN THE MEDIA HERE. ARAB PROTESTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO INCREASINGLY PROTRAY THE VISIT AS CONFIRMATION OF "ZIONISM IS RACISM" ARGUMENT.

B) IT PROVIDES THE MILITANT ARAB STATES WITH NEW GRIST FOR RENEWED EFFORTS TO CONVINCE BLACK AFRICA AND OTHER THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES TO EXPEL ISRAEL FROM THE UN. (DEPARTMENT HAS ALREADY IDENTIFIED UPCOMING AFRO-ARAB MEETING DESCRIBED REFTEL AS AVENUE FOR SUCH EFFORTS.)

C) IF AS A RESULT OF UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED ISRAEL ATTEMPTS TO PROVIDE MILITARY EQUIPMENT OR TECHNOLOGY TO SOUTH AFRICA, QUESTIONS WILL BE RAISED ABOUT US ACTIVE OR TACIT INVOLVEMENT OR ATLEAST OUR WILLINGNESS TO PUT A STOP TO IT. IN CONNECTION, LOCAL PRESS REPORTS THAT SENATOR PERCY, CURRENTLY TOURING AFRICA, HAS ALREADY BEEN ASKED IN DAR ES SALAAM ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF USARMS BEING PASSED TO SOUTH AFRICA VIA ISRAEL. PERCY IS QUOTED AS RESPONDING THAT USG "WOULD PUT A SANCTION ON THAT AND PROHIBIT IT
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WITHOUT EQUIVOCATION."

D) TO THE EXTENT THAT THE NEW ISRAELI-SOUTH AFRICAN UNDERTAKINGS ARE USED TO JUSTIFY FURTHER MULTILATERAL ACTION AGAINST ISRAEL AND SOUTH AFRICA, IT WILL INEVITABLY COMPLICATE THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE IN INTERNATIONAL FORA, ESPECIALLY IN OBTAINING SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL, AND IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH BLACK AFRICAN STATES.

8. WE ARE ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN BLACK AFRICAN AND THIRD WORLD REACTION TO THE VORSTER VISIT. WE WOULD WELCOME REPORTS ON HOW IT WAS RECEIVED. EMBASSY TEL AVIV'S ASSESSMENT OF ISRAELI PERCEPTIONS OF THE ISSUES RAISED IN PARAGRAPH 7 WOULD BE PARTICULARLY USEFUL TO US.
BOWDLER

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED AF POSTS.

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